

Escaping to Warmer Climates for the Holidays? Zika Is Still a Threat

DOVER – Many people like to plan getaways to warmer climates during the holidays to escape the chilly northeast coast weather. If you're one of them, the Division of Public Health (DPH) reminds you that Zika is still active in many south and central American countries, southeast Florida and even Southeast Asia. Since there is no vaccine for Zika virus yet, stopping a mosquito bite, and practicing safer sex if you are involved with someone who could be exposed, is still the best protection against the disease.

DPH confirmed last week that Delaware Zika cases are now at 17. The most recently announced case involves a female resident of Sussex County, for whom pregnancy is not at issue. All cases were caused by mosquito bites while traveling abroad. All but one of the Delaware Zika cases are in adults and none is pregnant. Of the 17 Delaware cases, nine are in New Castle County, three are in Kent County and five are in Sussex counties.

Anyone who is traveling abroad and gets bitten by a mosquito carrying Zika virus or, has unprotected sex with someone who has been exposed to the virus, including a local in that country, could get the disease. That same Delawarean could return home and spread it here through sexual activity or during pregnancy. To prevent spreading Zika during sexual activity, barrier methods (condoms, dental dams) should be used.

Women who are trying to become pregnant and have been diagnosed with Zika virus or have symptoms of Zika, should wait at least eight weeks after symptoms first appeared before

trying to conceive. Men who have been diagnosed with Zika virus or have symptoms are advised to wait at least six months after symptoms first appeared before having vaginal, oral, or anal unprotected sex.

For an updated list of countries impacted by Zika visit: www.cdc.gov/zika. The most recent CDC data (Dec. 14, 2016) shows that 4,617 people in the U.S. and DC have been infected with Zika virus, as have another 34,268 in the U.S. Territories.

“While mosquito season is over in Delaware, Zika remains a constant threat in other countries that are favorite travel spots for vacationers,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “It’s important to constantly remind people of the need to protect themselves while traveling and that pregnant women should avoid countries where Zika transmission is active.” Dr. Rattay stressed that pregnant women and their sexual partners need to be tested if they recently traveled to Zika affected areas. If the sexual partner has confirmed Zika, the couple should abstain from sex or use condoms and other barrier methods until the baby is born.

To reduce the risk of mosquito bites while traveling, use Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellents; stay in places with air conditioning or that use window or door screens to keep mosquitoes outside; sleep under a mosquito bed net if you are outside and not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes; treat clothing and gear with permethrin available in pharmacies or purchase permethrin-treated items; and wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.

Zika is a generally mild illness caused by a virus primarily transmitted through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes. About one in five people infected with the virus develop the disease, and most people who are infected do not develop symptoms. The most common symptoms of Zika virus infection are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes).

However, while it is often mild, Zika has been linked to serious birth defects in infants whose mothers were infected during the pregnancy and rare but serious health complications in adults.

To learn more about Zika and Delaware, visit <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/zika.html>. Women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant can find more information by visiting:

- <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/files/zikaflyerforpregnantwomen.pdf> (English)
- <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/files/zikaflyerforpregnantwomensp.pdf> (Español)
- <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/files/zikaflyerforpregnantwomenhc.pdf> (kreyòl ayisyen)

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.